DEFCON 33 Voting Village: Incident Report
August 11, 2025

[Written by the Executive Director of the Institute for Secure activism, Brian Stearns]

I have been the security lead for the Voting Village at DEFCON for three years, at DEFCONs 31, 32, and 33. This incident report is based on the facts as best as I can remember them, as well as statements I received from DEFCON Security Operations Center (SOC) personnel ("SOC Goons").

On Friday 8 August at (very VERY approximately) 1330 PST I observed an individual sitting at a table at the back of the Voting Village speaker room apparently folding pamphlets. This individual was unknown to me at the time, however after this incident multiple people identified this individual to me as John Brakey. While I am uncertain about the specific details of the next few minutes, I do recall observing Voting Village Secretary of the Board David Jefferson interacting with the individual and reading the pamphlet. I also recall that shortly thereafter I became aware that Mr. Jefferson had determined that he had no issue with the contents of the pamphlets and didn't mind if the individual distributed them in the Voting Village. I relayed this information to Voting Village Executive Director Catherine Terranova and Member of the Board Kendall Spencer, Esquire. Both expressed their disagreement with Mr. Jefferson's assessment, and to the best of my recollection Mr. Spencer also expressed concern that distribution of literature which the Voting Village had not vetted is against Voting Village policy. I took this information to Mr. Jefferson and recommended that I instruct the individual on Voting Village policy and ask him not to distribute literature in the Village. Mr. Jefferson immediately assented.

I approached the Mr. Brakey and attempted to calmly convey Voting Village policy. I acknowledged that Mr. Jefferson had previously agreed that the pamphlets could be distributed. However, upon further policy review with other staff members and a check-in with Mr. Jefferson, we determined that it was against Village policy for unvetted literature to be distributed within the Village. I asked him therefore to not distribute his literature. Mr. Brakey became immediately belligerent, demanding that I refund his DEFCON entrance fee, stating that he has been a long-time professional in the field and will not stand to be treated in such a way, demanding that I vet his literature right then and there, and other protestations. An individual sitting beside Mr. Brakey, who I later learned was Jessica Denson, attempted to intervene and calm Mr. Brakey. Mr. Brakey ignored her. I assessed that his apparent unbroken train of thought and ongoing diatribe was not conducive to de-escalation efforts. I made the intentional choice to assume a more dominant posture and raise my voice in an attempt to interrupt his protestations and be sure that I was heard. My strategy was successful, and he and I both quickly lowered our voices and postures to the point where he was able to ask me if he could distribute his literature in the hallway outside the Village. I told him that outside the Village was not in my scope of coverage and that whatever he chose to do in the hallway was not my concern. He appeared to accept my statement and stepped out of the Village. Neither I nor, to the best of my knowledge, any other Village personnel had any further contact with him.

Some minutes later I observed a Las Vegas Convention and Visitor Authority (LVCVA) police officer and K9 entering the Village. When I questioned the officer as to his presence, he indicated that he had been called because an individual was distributing literature. I told him that as the Village security lead I did not call him, and to the best of my knowledge no other Village personnel had. In the next few minutes I observed three more LVCVA officers, three Designated Defense (DD) contract security personnel (hired by the Las Vegas Convention Center, LVCC), and two SOC Goons, along with Mr. Brakey, entering the Voting Village. Mr. Brakey was directed to collect his belongings and was then escorted from the Village. Neither I nor any Village personnel were involved in that interaction either inside nor outside the Village. When Mr. Brakey, the SOC Goons,

DD personnel, and LVCVA officers departed the Village, no-one in the Village had any further role in the incident.

In an after-incident exchange with the SOC, I learned more about what apparently happened in the hallway. A summary of my exchange with SOC personnel is as follows: Mr. Brakey was handing out fliers without permission within the Voting Village, violating Village policy. While he initially was belligerent with Village staff, he eventually complied with their request to stop, and left the Village. He then began handing out fliers in the hall. DEFCON SOC personnel in the hall then informed him that this violated DEFCON and LVCC policies, and asked him to stop and leave. When he did not comply, SOC called security. LVCC contract security personnel and LVCVA police officers responded. He insisted on being arrested and initially refused to go unless formally cited. Although he briefly agreed to leave after receiving a refund, he changed his mind, again demanding police involvement in the form of a formal arrest. Ultimately, he left voluntarily, with his refund, escorted by security and police. At no time did any personnel make physical contact with the subject.

I, Brian C. Stearns, Executive Director of the Institute for Secure Activism and Security Lead for the Voting Village at DEFCON 33, attest that this account of the incident is accurate, complete, and truthful in all relevant details, to the best of my ability to recall, as of 8:45pm EST Sunday 11 August 2025.